Artists put high value on festival

Record sales at this year's Artisphere partly account for high ratings, organizers say

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Artists' sales this year with Artisphere were the highest ever.

The 120 artists who participated in the three-day visual arts festival in May enjoyed average sales of $5,005, a significant increase from last year's record high of $4,215.

"With sales appreciating every year, the word among the artists is that Greenville is a great festival to attend," Artisphere executive director Kerry Murphy said.

Higher sales increase the nationwide competition among artists hoping to participate in the festival, Murphy said. That ultimately improves the diversity and quality of art works available for the tens of thousands of art patrons who attend the festival.

"I heard so many comments from patrons on the street saying the quality of the art is the best they've ever seen," Murphy said.

A record number of 800 artists applied for the 120 slots available at the seventh annual Artisphere this year, Murphy said. That was 100 more than last year.

Murphy expects the number of applicants to increase as the reputation of the still-young festival continues to grow.

In a survey of almost 70 percent of the artists who attended Artisphere, which took place May 13-15, the event also earned high marks for hospitality, scoring 4.6 out of 5.

"We always receive good scores for artist hospitality," Murphy said. "That's a direct testa-

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ment to the volunteers who work so hard and the patrons who attend the festival."

Volunteers work at Artisphere to generate money for nonprofit organizations.

This year, Artisphere donated $20,000 to nine local nonprofits: Carolina Ballet Theatre, Chicora Voices, the Dance Alliance, the Chinese Cultural Association, the Greenville Chorale, Greenville in Harmony, the Hispanic-American Women's Cultural Association, the South Carolina Children's Theatre and the South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts and Humanities.

Artisphere has been ranked twice as a Top 20 Fine Arts Festival by Greg Lawler's "Art Fair Sourcebook."

"The entire Greenville community is responsible for Artisphere's climb to the top of the nation's art show rankings," said Bob Nachman, president of the Artisphere board of directors. "The vision of our board, the commitment of our donors and sponsors and the community's support of the arts continue to make this festival a Top 20 art show."

The festival earned high compliments from many artists who responded to the artist survey.

Gary Love, a photographer from Riverside, Calif., said he and his wife believe Artisphere and Greenville are their "favorite show and town."

"It has the nicest people of any city we exhibit in," Love wrote. "We always hate to leave."

This year's festival benefitted greatly from pleasant weather, despite dark clouds that threatened rain over the weekend.

"I don't know how we dodged that bullet," Murphy said.

The 2012 Artisphere will take place May 11-15. To learn more, see the website www.artisphere.us.